

2000 Session Report



Mark Miloscia

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Dear Neighbors,

This newsletter is my chance to inform you about key issues affecting the 30th District, including how the Legislature responded to Initiative 695 – which cut the state's share of car license tabs to \$30.

I-695 also cut \$1.1 billion in funding for cities, counties, highways and mass transit. We passed legislation to keep the state's share of car tabs at \$30. We also worked hard to find ways of easing the pain of that \$1.1 billion in budget cuts.

Inside, you'll find information about:

- The new House budget
- The Patients' Bill of Rights
- Reforms to make government better, faster and cheaper
- Tax cuts
- Retraining for laid-off aerospace, timber and fish workers
- Legislation to protect your privacy

If you have any questions or comments, please contact my office by e-mail, phone or letter. Hearing directly from you is very important to me.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your representative, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mark Miloscia
State Representative
30th Legislative District



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Initiative 695

There are two important things the House did to respond to I-695:

1. We kept the state's share of car tabs at \$30.
2. We helped ease the budget cuts caused by I-695.

Cities, counties and mass transit were all hit hard by I-695, which cut funding by \$1.1 billion. Bus drivers got pink slips, and highway projects were put on hold.

Dealing with I-695 was our top priority this session. There wasn't an extra \$1.1 billion in the state budget to stop every cut, but we worked hard to find funding to help cities, counties and mass transit until permanent solutions can be found.

We also fought hard so that education did not get cut to pave highways.

I'm happy to report that despite the tied House, we managed to negotiate a budget that Republicans and Democrats could support, passing 85-13. We put aside our differences to pass a budget that's a victory for the citizens of Washington state, not one party or the other.

Local highlights of the budget

The City of Federal Way and King County were hit hard by I-695. Federal Way lost \$1.6 million, and the House budget sends about \$700,000 in aid. King County lost \$7.3 million, and \$5.5 million is dedicated to easing the pains of that cut.

Important local projects: \$4.6 million for a park-and-ride in Federal Way, \$3.3 million to improve State Route 167 from 8th Street to 15th Street SW, \$1.8 million for grade separation on State Route 509, \$710,000 to improve State Route 99 and funds to extend HOV lanes on I-5.

(Note: as of press time, the final budget had not passed the Legislature, so these figures are not yet final.)

Reform

We need to find ways to make government better, faster and cheaper.

The old ideologies don't work anymore. Some lawmakers have traditionally blamed everything on too much government spending and regulation, with the answer being cutting — or eliminating — every government service. Other lawmakers have tried to fix every problem with a government program.

Those old approaches are extremes that don't work. I advocate a different approach. The citizens I talk to have common sense about all this. Folks want essential services — police protection, public schools, highways — that the free market won't provide. But citizens don't want to drastically expand government, and they don't want to kill or privatize every function of the state.

I want to change the nature and attitude of state government. We must transform government rather than simply change a few policies and regulations. The essential nature of state government needs to be brought up to date, so that state agencies are just as nimble and quick to respond to the needs of customers as the businesses in our state leading the new high-tech economy.

To make state agencies more modern and flexible, I pushed to pass a number of reforms, including:

- **Citizens' commission** – Other states have formed permanent groups of citizens who take fresh looks at how state agencies operate and suggest ways of serving citizens better, faster and cheaper. States have saved billions of dollars through these efforts. My legislation establishing a permanent commission died in the Senate after passing the House, but I did manage to create and fund the commission in the House budget.
- **Answer the phone** – Nothing is more irritating than calling a business or state agency and getting lost in telephone limbo. While legislation to improve telephone service died in the House and Senate, I am happy to report that Gov. Gary Locke heeded our call and issued an executive order. Now, every agency is changing the way they handle phone calls to respond more quickly and have more live human voices on the other end.
- **Civil service reform and contracting out** – One of the keys to making state government more flexible and speedy is changing the ancient civil service rules. Legislation this session would have reformed those outdated rules and given state workers more flexibility in responding to the needs of citizens. The legislation also allows the state to contract out when it makes sense to do so, and this is a crucial reform if we're to make government better, faster and cheaper. Despite bipartisan support in the Senate and strong support from Gov. Locke, the bill didn't get a hearing in the House – but I'll keep pushing for this crucial reform.

Cleaning up politics

We need to clean up politics and reduce the power of Big Money to win elections and influence state government. The good news is that campaign reform is getting more and more attention, both in the media and among citizens.

Sen. John McCain of Arizona proved that citizens do care about taking back their government from the lobbyists and special interests. Average citizens don't have a say — not when their voices are drowned out by the wealthy special interests and lobbyists who own all the political megaphones. In fact, lobbyists can drown out the voices of lawmakers — there are 933 registered lobbyists in Olympia but just 98 representatives and 49 senators.

The bad news is that lobbyists successfully squashed all efforts to clean up politics this session. However, I'll keep fighting to clean up the system and take back government from the special interests.

Worker Retraining & Tax Fairness Act

The first bill signed by Gov. Gary Locke this session was the Worker Retraining and Tax Fairness Act, which will prevent \$580 million in tax increases over the next six years while establishing the best worker retraining program in the nation.

A total of \$140 million will retrain displaced workers for high-demand jobs such as the software or construction industries.

The economy is changing fast, with workers losing jobs in traditional fields like timber, aerospace and fishing. Another problem is a lack of skilled workers for high-tech jobs — an estimated 60,000 new high-tech jobs will be created in the next three years. Employers need workers with the right training to fill those jobs.

This legislation tackles both problems by setting up training programs for displaced workers, with up to 52 weeks of training for all dislocated workers and 74 weeks of training for timber, fishing and aerospace workers.

Cub Scout Troop 330 of Federal Way traveled to Olympia to learn how the Legislature works and earn their government badge. Citizens of all ages should be informed and involved in the democratic process, and I was proud to see these young men take the time to learn about their state government.

Protecting your privacy

Everything you think is private information about yourself — credit card numbers, medical records, who you call, how much is in your bank account — isn't safe. In fact, it's probably for sale on a Web site, or being sold to telemarketers by a bank or insurance company.

To protect your privacy, we pushed hard for a number of bills, including compromise legislation that Attorney General Christine Gregoire helped craft. The legislation would give citizens key protections, including:

- The right to know privacy policies of businesses that share information about you, the customer, and your rights and options as a consumer.
- The right to refuse business requests for information that go beyond what's really needed to buy a product or service.
- The right to review and correct information about you that could be shared
- The right to know that your most sensitive information won't be shared with third parties without your written OK.
- The right to block personal information from being shared with marketers.
- The right to refuse telemarketing and junk mail from businesses.

These are basic, common-sense protections for citizens. Yet wealthy special interests killed this modest compromise bill. We watched as dozens and dozens of lobbyists, including superlobbyists from out-of-state megacorporations, fly into Olympia to kill the bill. And they did.

Next session, I'll keep fighting for basic consumer protections, including legislation I introduced to find out what information all the various state agencies collect about citizens.



Tax cuts

Property values and property taxes have skyrocketed in many parts of our state. To help reduce the burden on homeowners, the House focused on:

- **Seniors** – Under the House plan, eligible seniors would get a break of between \$200 and \$500 on the state's portion of their property taxes.
- **School construction** – Local property taxes have gone up because the state slashed its share of the bill for building schools. The state used to pay two-thirds; now it pays just one-third of the bill. The House budget moves that toward a fairer share, 50-50, which would reduce local property tax burdens and help our local schools.

The Patients' Bill of Rights

Health-care decisions should be made by you and your doctor, not accountants working at insurance companies on the East Coast.

Patients deserve basic consumer protections when it comes to health care, especially when their health is in danger and an insurance company denies coverage.

I'm proud to say that the House and Senate passed a Patients' Bill of Rights. Those rights include:

1. **The right to know** – Making the process more open and honest by giving you information about your health plans, and by making clear the plan's grievance process before you buy health coverage.
2. **The right to privacy** – Protecting you from invasions of privacy, such as insurance companies sharing or selling your medical records to make a profit.
3. **The right to choose your doctor** – Giving patients more choice in picking family doctors, and seeing specialists when needed.
4. **The right to appeal** – Appealing to an independent review board when you are denied health care, rather than relying on an insurance company to police itself.
5. **The right to justice** – Making insurance companies responsible and liable, just like anyone else, if they cause injury or death by wrongly denying health coverage.

